

Election Monitoring in Nigeria Using the Swift Count Methodology

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Abstract

This work examines the traditional system of monitoring elections in Nigeria and its attendant problem which called for a more acceptable and scientific approach to election monitoring so as to restore voters confidence in elections. This led to the introduction and adoption of a new system known as the parallel vote tabulation {PVT}

The methodology employed is case study of the application of PVT in some countries and in Nigeria and content analysis, of primary and secondary materials. It was discovered that the new scientific method using the short message system is quicker and more effective in the process of monitoring elections. The use of statistics makes the margin of error between its result and those of the electoral body very insignificant and very similar, thus attesting to the accuracy and reliability of the new method. The new approach has revolutionized the process of election monitoring in Nigeria and brought it at par with international standard and practice. Its application in Nigeria has led to the building of integrity and given legitimacy to elections and its outcome.

The objectives of employing the new method were met and because the margin of error between it figures and those on INEC is very minimal, its reports can be used for electoral cases in courts and tribunals.

Observers were able to give accurate assessment in percentage rating, the process of accreditation, voting, counting and incidence and arrival of materials and officials during elections. The level of attack the observers suffered is an indication that many Nigerians are yet to come to terms with their activities and the roles they can play in influencing transformation of election process. On the other hand, they were also harassed because their presence at polling stations posed a hindrance to rigging.

Keywords- Election Monitoring, Parallel Vote Tabulation, Swift Count, Independent National Electoral Commission.

1. Parallel Vote Tabulation

Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) is a statistical election observation methodology employed for independent verification or challenge of election results. It is a new advanced approach to election observation which was introduced in the Philippines in 1986. It employs statistical principles and largely dependent on information and communication technologies {ICTs} to provide rapid systematic information on the conduct of voting and counting and verify the accuracy of the results of selected elections.

It involves observation of the voting process, counting of ballots, and collation of official polling station results and independent tabulation of these results, parallel to election authorities. If the PVT is performed on statistical sample of the polling stations, it is called Quick Count or Swift count. Members of the Philippine National Citizen Movement for Free Elections [NAMFREL] are widely recognized as the pioneers of the quick count, or parallel vote tabulation (PVT) for emerging democracies. In the 1986 Presidential election, NAMFREL attempted to project the official count of all 90,000 polling stations by collecting data from majority of polling stations thus providing evidence that assisted in uncovering the massive vote counting fraud attempted by Marcos supporters.

1.1 P. V. T. In Nigeria

PVT was introduced to some civil society organizations which met in Oshogbo Osun state in May 2010 at the instance of the National Democratic Institute {NDI}. The meeting was attended by the Nigerian Bar association {NBA}, Federation of Muslim Women Associations in Nigeria {FOMWAN}, Justice, Development and Peace Caritas of the Catholic Church and Transition Monitoring Group {TMG}. Before that meeting, the organizations were not aware of the system. They were only used to the traditional method of observing elections, cumbersome in collation of observation findings with speed and verify election results as announced by the Independent National Electoral Commission [INEC]. Having agreed to employ the system in the 2011 general elections, NDI engaged in further consultations with the partnering organizations and solicited their support to ensure success of the project.

'The groups decided to come together to pursue the new initiative and accepted that elections observation in Nigeria from the April 2011 general election would be observed differently. This was because previous election observation so much emphasized presence at the polling stations and duplication of efforts. The system had not made much impact in the outcome of the elections even though it deterred fraud. Reporting by them tended to be a presentation of general statements and or anecdotes. In the 2011 general elections, the group decided to give precise and comprehensive information on the gubernatorial and presidential elections'

They signed a memorandum of understanding and entered another with NDI. The groups decided to come together to execute a joint project instead of a coalition due to their diverse mode of operations. After brainstorming sessions, Project 2011Swift Count was adopted as the Nigerian version of the PVT. This was because it was designed for that year electoral process alone. The project was extended to 2012 because of the governorship election held that year. The pilot and test case project was formally launched on 18th September 2010 in Abuja.

NDI facilitated the process of bringing the partner organization together, providing technical support and advice at each stage of the project. Financial support was provided by international donors like United States Agency for International Development {USAID} and United Kingdom Department for International Development {DFID} The Nigerian 2011 Swift Count Project is the biggest ever implemented due to the high level of commitment of the donors. Support was also obtained from the diplomatic missions in Nigeria, international observers such as the Commonwealth, African Union, ECOWAS and other local observers.

1.2 Swift Count Methodology

The swift count methodology provides voters, political contestants and electoral authorities with an accurate, real-time picture of the conduct of the accreditation of voters, voting and counting. It thus deters anyone tempted to manipulate the process and provide voters and political contestants greater confidence that the official results accurately reflected the ballots cast. The methodology aimed at obtaining and sharing with Nigerians, qualitative and quantitative data and analysis using SMS which creates the possibility of verifying the accuracy of results announced by INEC based on the statistical sampling of polling sites across the country.

Swift count uses samples of polling units for each election that have been carefully selected by trained Nigerian statisticians, using time tested statistical principles to ensure that they are both representative and unbiased. The methodology uses the latest technology of text messages transmitted by cell phones to a central data base. This enables project swift count to present an objective, non partisan, real-time picture of the conduct of election and to verify the accuracy of the official results.

1.3 Application in 2011/12 Elections

After the launch of the project in September 2010 it was decided that the methodology should be applied in the review of voters register as pilot project and then formally in the 2011/12 elections. The partnering groups embarked on media sensitization and stakeholder's consultation so as to create awareness. In December of that year, they embarked on the printing of about 20,000 checklists and incident forms for the voter's registration exercise and the election proper. Thereafter, series of training were conducted for different levels of personnel. In order to ensure that their work met international standard, the training reviewed and refreshed participants knowledge on election observation principle and practices, introduced them to the new method and its accounting requirements and up to date knowledge.

Comparism of swift count estimates with INEC presidential election result

| Political parties | Swift Count Estimates | Official INEC Result | Margin of Error | Lower Limit | Upper Limit |
|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|
| PDP | 58.7% | 58.9% | +/-1.2 | 57.5% | 59.9% |
| CPC | 30.8% | 32.0% | +/-1.2 | 29.6% | 32.0% |
| ACN | 5.3% | 5.4% | +/-0.3 | 5.6% | 5.6% |
| ANPP | 2.7% | 3.0% | +/-0.3 | 3.0% | 3.0% |

1.4 Impact

The employment of the methodology brought about some innovations in domestic election monitoring in Nigeria as follows:

A national information centre was opened at Sheraton hotel in Abuja equipped with computers, satellite and internet facilities. 74 data clerks were recruited and trained to gather information from the observers on the field. The data

clerks ran two duty shifts, one in the morning and another in the afternoon. This was to ensure that all information received were well captured and documented for analysis.

8000 Election Day observers were recruited and trained. They were accredited by INEC before deployment to their random sampled polling stations. They were then deployed in each state, senatorial district, federal constituency and all the 774 LGAs. The observers recorded their findings and reported same based on a checklist developed with optional answers to the national information centre via coded text messages. Messages were sent through short codes specifically assigned to the state. The over 8000 observers, 798 LGA supervisors, about 150 state coordinating committee members, staff of local secretariats including 6 zonal coordinators and 8 members of the national steering committee were all drawn in almost equal numbers from the four organizations.

The use of the time tested statistical principles and ICT tools provided swift count with more timely, precise and representative observation reports to the information centre. The process drastically reduced the amount of time it normally took for a report to get to the NIC. While the state coordinating teams and the LGAs supervisors were mobile observers, they at the same time exercised oversight function on the observers in the field on election days.

The observers, data entry clerks and members of the national steering committee had a moral obligation to conduct themselves according to the highest ethical standards of the project after signing a code of conduct and an oath of secrecy. Hence the results from the states were a true reflection of the election result as released by INEC making the margin of error insignificant.

Project swift count or PVT enabled the recruiting, training, deploying and managing of data from thousands of observers in all 774 local government areas covering all 36 states and the FCT for the first time.

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